

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 2144

STATE FOR A/OS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASCH, KU

SUBJ: AMERICAN SCHOOL-KUWAIT

REF: KUWAIT 2107

SUMMARY:SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH MAY HAVE OCCURED ON EXPANSION PROBLEM OF AMERICAN SCHOOL IN KUWAIT WITH MINISTER OF EDUCATION SEEKING "SECRET" DONATIONS FROM PRINCIPAL KUWAITI AGENCIES EMPLOYING AMERICAN CONTRACTOR COMPANIES. WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY DEVELOPEMENT, BYT NOT ENTIRELY SANGUINE THAT IT WILL BEAR FRUIT. DEPARTMENT WILL BE KEPT INFORMED. END SUMMARY.

1. SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH MAY HAVE OCCURED ON EXPANSION PROBLEM OF AMERICAN SCHOOL IN KUWAIT. ON MAY 2 CHARGE MET WITH UNDER SECRETARY OF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (YA'QUOB Y. AL-GHUNAIM) PRIOR TO DEPARTURE OF MINISTER FOR ONE-MONTH VISIT TO UNITED STATES. GHUNAIM SAID HE HAD RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE MINISTER TO ADVISE THE AMERICAN SCHOOL IN WRITING THAT SCHOOL BOARD'S CURRENT EFFORTS TO SOLICIT EXPANSION FEE FROM PARENTS AND INTERESTED US COMPANIES MUST BE HALTED. AT SAME TIME, GHUNAIM INSTRUCTED BY MINISTER TO MEET "IN STRICT CONFIDENCE" WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE (SHAIKH SA'D) AND CHAIRMAN OF TWO MAJOR GOVERMENT OIL COMPANIES (KUWAIT OIL COMPANY AND KUWAIT NATIONAL PETROLEUM COMPANY);
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A. TO ADVISE THEM OF THE URGENT NEED TO HELP THE SCHOOL BOARD FIND SUFFICIENT FUNDS TO MEET ITS EXPANSION NEEDS;
B. TO REQUEST THAT THE THREE GOVERNMENT ENTITIES MAKE SIZEABLE "SECRET" DONATIONS TO THE SCHOOL; AND,
C. TO SOLICIT THEIR ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING SIZEABLE "PUBLIC" DONATIONS BY AMERICAN CONTRACTOR COMPANIES NEW TO KUWAIT.

2. CHARGE QUESTIONED AL-GHUNAIM CLOSELY ON HIS INSTRUCTIONS, EXPLAINING THEY WENT FAR BEYOND LIMITED ASSISTANCE PROFFERED BY MINISTER ON APRIL 28. UNDER SECRETARY SAID HE ALREADY HAD DISCUSSED MATTER WITH KOC AND KNPC WHO WERE "STUDYING PROBLEM." HE INTENDED TO CONTACT MINISTER OF DEFENSE FOLLOWING MINISTER OF EDUCATION'S DEPARTURE FROM KUWAIT. HE ASSURED CHARGE THAT NEITHER EMBASSY NOR SCHOOL BOARD HAD CAUSE FOR CONCERN. HOWEVER, HE WARNED MATTER MUST BE CLOSELY HELD.

3. CHARGE HAS ASKED AMERICAN SCHOOL (LARSON) TO INFORM SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS THAT THEY SHOULD AVOID ANY PUBLIC OR PRIVATE CRITICISM OF MINISTER OR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PENDING FURTHER DEVELOPEMENTS. AT SUBSEQUENT MEETING (AIRPORT DEPARTURE), CHARGE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION TO MINISTER FOR HIS EFFORTS TO HELP SCHOOL WITHOUT GOING INTO MECHANICS. MINISTER SIMPLY SMILED AND SAID HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT MATTER WOULD BE RESOLVED.

4. COMMENT: EMBASSY UNCERTAIN WHY MINISTER OF EDUCATION HAS REVERSED HIMSELF ON QUESTION OF ASSISTANCE. (WE DID NOT "MISUNDERSTAND" HIS NEGATIVE ATTITUDE ON APRIL 28.) WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THIS NEW INITIATIVE WILL RESULT IN THE ASSISTANCE NEEDED. IN ANY CASE, WE INTEND TO LAY LOW UNTIL WE GET SOME INDICATION OF WHETHER PLAN IS SUCCEEDING. IF, IN FACT, THREE GOK AGENCIES COME UP WITH YET UNSPECIFIED SUM IT WILL BE A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH NOT PREVIOUSLY EXPERIENCED IN KUWAIT. (ALTHOUGH WE SUSPECT THAT LOCAL ENGLISH MAY HAVE RECEIVED SOME HIDDEN ASSISTANCE IN PAST). IF DONATIONS ARE MADE, WE BELIEVE THEY PROBABLY WILL BE CHANNELLED INDIRECTLY THROUGH LOCAL AMERICAN OR OTHER COMPANIES. EMBASSY WILL REPORT FURTHER DEVELOPEMENTS. MEANWHILE, IF DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS MEET MINISTER DURING HIS CURRENT VISIT TO US THEY MAY WISH TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION FOR HIS INTEREST IN THE PROBLEMS OF THE AMERICAN SCHOOL.

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